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ABSTRACT

This report details findings of the Cost, Quality, and Outcomes (CQO) Study, which examined the influence of typical center-based childcare on children's development during their preschool years and then subsequently as they moved into elementary school. Among the major findings of the study are that children who attended higher quality childcare centers scored higher on cognitive and social skills measures in childcare and through the transition into school. This influence of childcare quality was important for children from a wide range of family backgrounds. Childcare quality prior to school entry affected children's development at least through kindergarten. For math skills and problem behaviors, children whose mothers had lower levels of education benefited even more from high quality childcare, with these influences sustained through second grade. The quality of childcare classroom practices was related to children's cognitive development, while the closeness of the caregiver-child relationship influenced children's social development through the early school years. The report concludes with discussion of implications for practice and policy, focusing on fiscal strategies, system and program change strategies, and professional preparation and compensation approaches. (KB)

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NCEDL Spotlights

No. 11 June 1999

CQO Children Go To School

Following are excerpts from "The Children of the Cost, Quality, and Outcomes Study Go To School," Executive Summary, June, 1999, by the Cost, Quality, Outcomes Study Team. Begun in 1993, the CQO study examined the influence of typical center-based child care on children's development during their preschool years and then subsequently as they moved into elementary school. The executive summary is available online at www.ncedl.org.

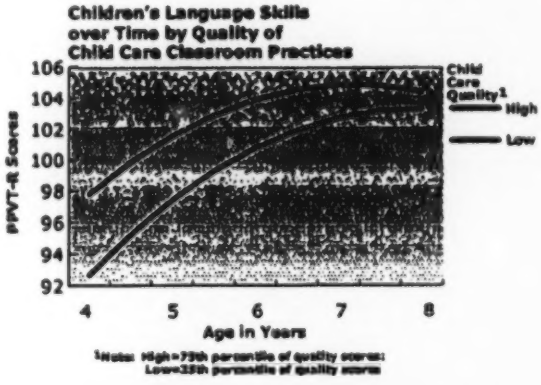
Benefits of quality child care persist into elementary grades

In recent years there has been increasing interest in the effects of preschool experiences—especially child care—on children's later performance in school. A substantial majority of preschoolers now participate in some form of child care before coming to school. In the CQO study, researchers in four states examined child care quality during children's next-to-last year in child care and continued to follow children for four more years, through the end of second grade. Here are summaries of the overall findings

High quality child care is an im-portant element in achieving the na-tional goal of having all children ready for school. Children who attended higher quality child care centers scored higher on measures of both cognitive and social skills in child care and through the transition into school. Further, this influence of child care quality was important for children from a wide range of family backgrounds.

High quality child care continues to positively predict children's performance well into their school careers. The quality of child care experienced by these children before they entered school continued to affect their development at least through kindergarten and in many cases through the end of second grade. Child care quality was related to cognitive skills (language and math) and social skills, both of which are important factors in children's ability to take advantage of the opportunities available in school.

Children who have traditionally been at risk of not doing well in school are affected more by the quality of child care experiences than other children. For some outcomes (math skills and problem behaviors), children whose mothers had lower levels of education benefited even more from high quality child care. Moreover, these influences of child care quality for children at risk were sustained through second grade.



The quality of child care classroom practices was related to children's cognitive development, while the closeness of the child care teacher-child relationship influenced children's social development through the early school years. Children who attended child care with higher quality classroom practices had better cognitive development through early elementary school, while children who had closer relationships with their child care teachers had better classroom behavior and social skills over this time period. High quality child care experiences, in terms of both classroom practices and teacher-child relationships, enhance children's abilities to take advantage of the educational opportunities in school.

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Implications for practice and policy

There is one overarching implication from the study: If America wants all its children to be ready for school, it must improve the quality of child care experiences available in this country. The first phase of this study indicated that a majority of children in child care did not have access to high quality care. The current phase of research shows that this lack of quality care has negative effects on children's school readiness and development during the early school years. Below are a number of suggested ways of working toward the goal of high quality child care.

Fiscal strategies

- The quality set-aside in the federal and state funds for child care is a wise investment and should be extended.
- Subsidy systems can be reconfigured to tie subsidy payments to higher program standards and to provide higher compensation for teachers.
- Tax incentives should be redesigned to encourage use of higher quality care and education.

System and program change strategies

- Recent comprehensive attempts by states to provide preschool care and education experiences for children are well founded and should be greatly expanded.
- Programs which are accredited by national accrediting agencies tend to have higher quality. Efforts to expand use of such accrediting could prove useful in overall efforts to raise the quality of child care.
- Improvements and expansion of the teacher prepar- ation systems will be needed.
- States should focus on improving licensing standards as a means of raising quality.

Professional preparation and compensation approaches:

- States should require higher minimum levels of training for teachers than are currently in place. Formal training is a key element for teacher preparation and should be required such as through some form of credentialling comparable to the K–12 system.
- Teacher preparation programs should include a greater focus on helping teachers develop skills in relationship building with young children.
- Inservice training is also important in building a high quality early childhood system.
- Teacher compensation issues are important to address so that these training initiatives will produce long-term improvements in child care quality.

If you want to know more

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The authors of ***The Children of the Cost, Quality, and Outcomes Study Go To School, Executive Summary,*** include Ellen Peisner-Feinberg, Margaret Burchinal, Richard Clifford, & Noreen Yazejian, all at UNC-CH; Carollee Howes & Patricia Byler at UCLA; Mary Culkin & Janice Zelazo at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center; and Sharon Lynn Kagan & Jean Rustici at Yale University. NCEDL is administratively housed at UNC-CH. This project is supported in part under the Education Research and Development Centers Program, PR/award number R307A60004, as administered by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education. Other funders of this research include the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the William T. Grant Foundation, the JFM Foundation, the A. L. Mailman Family Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Pew Charitable Trusts, the USWEST Foundation, and the Smith Richardson Foundation. Opinions in these reports do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the National Institute on Early Childhood Development and Education **www.ed.gov/offices/OERI/ECI/**, the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, the U.S. Department of Education, or any other sponsoring organization. Permission is granted to reprint this ***Spotlight***; we ask that you acknowledge the authors of the paper on which this ***Spotlight*** is based and the National Center for Early Development & Learning.

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